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Weekly Summary

Special Report

Election Time in South Africa

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ELECTION TIME IN SOUTH AFRICA

Summary

Prime Minister Vorster's call for a general parliamentary election on April 24, a full year before required, enables the ruling National Party to exploit fully the current disarray in the opposition United Party. Vorster, whose party has been in power since 1948 and currently holds 118 of the 166 seats in the National Assembly, wants a fresh mandate from the all-white electorate to strengthen his hand in dealing with basic economic and social problems.

Although the National Party is expected to renew its firm control of parliament, the election could open a critical phase in South Africa's racial relations. A strong showing at the polls might encourage Vorster to go ahead with reforms that would provide the non-white bulk of the population with significant material gains. It is doubtful, however, that any politically feasible reforms will meet the already evident pressures for social change.

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Background

The National Party represents the bulk of the Afrikaners—descendants of the 17th century Dutch settlers who now comprise some 60 percent of the whites in South Africa. Their traditional dislike of the British settlers who began arriving in the late 18th century was intensified by the Boer War and the ensuing ascendancy of British elements in what was from 1910 to 1960 the Union of South Africa. The National Party came to power in 1948 by asserting the determination of Afrikaners to secure their language and culture from alien inroads, and by stressing the doctrine of "apartheid," or separate development of the races.

Once in power, leaders of the National Party sought cooperation from English-speaking whites by emphasizing solidarity in order to maintain white supremacy. Since becoming prime minister in 1966, Vorster has tended to be relatively pragmatic in implementing apartheid. Even his

cautious adjustments to changing conditions, however, have outraged the "verkramptes," or ultraconservatives in his party; at the same time, the adjustments have been criticized as too timid by the few Afrikaner intellectuals who openly espouse significant accommodations with other ethnic groups.

The ideological tensions within Afrikanerdom surfaced during the 1970 general elections, when a verkrampte splinter party competed. It failed, however, to win a single seat in parliament, although the opposition United Party gained an additional eight seats. Apparently, Vorster's hard-line campaign rhetoric mollified verkrampte sentiments in the party's rural strongholds, but displeased some Afrikaner suburbanites and alienated the few English-speakers who had joined the party since 1948.

Since 1970, however, the United Party has fumbled the opportunities for rebuilding its pre-1948 coalition between moderate Afrikaners and the bulk of the English-speaking whites. The only conceivable basis for white solidarity in South Africa is a persuasive strategy for coexistence with the potentially overwhelming majority of non-whites; the racial composition of South Africa's population of 23.9 million is 70-percent black, 18-percent white, 9-percent colored (mulatto), and 3-percent Asian. The disparate components of the United Party have been unable to agree on a convincing alternative to the Nationalist blueprint for separate development, which promises to maintain white supremacy by partitioning the blacks among eventually independent Bantustans.



Prime Minister Vorster

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Economic Problems

In the present election campaign, Vorster has claimed credit for a full year of solid economic growth. He has also asserted that the Arab oil embargo imposed on South Africa last November vindicates his party's long-time pursuit of self-sufficiency in strategic materials. Indeed, although South Africa relies on imports for all its oil needs, ample coal reserves and thorough preparations for an oil embargo averted serious economic disruption during the acute phase of the international oil shortage. Subsequently, Pretoria's readiness to pay the going international prices for oil has minimized the actual impact of a continuing Arab boycott against South Africa. Although South Africa's oil bill this year probably will be more than three times higher than in 1973, the steep rise in international prices for South African gold since January portends a healthy balance of payments for 1974.

The Prime Minister is well aware, however, that secondary effects of the international oil crisis will soon intensify chronic inflationary pressures that are contributing to social unrest. The rising cost of living was a root cause of the many illegal strikes among black workers that tied up local industry in Durban in February 1973. Although the strikes were illegal, Durban municipal authorities avoided a police crackdown on the strikers and urged employers to raise wages. The first wave of strikes subsided, but limited gains for the strikers, instead of harsh punishment, have encouraged recurrences.

Recently, Pretoria imposed legal restrictions on four white trade union officials who were organizing black textile workers around Durban. Two of the individuals had helped to end a large strike by persuading factory managers to deal informally with leaders of a black union. Such actions undercut a labor code that permits black unions, but excludes black union officials from collective bargaining.

Most white workers oppose affiliating black workers with established white unions and are likewise wary of any tampering with provisions of the labor codes that reserve skilled industrial jobs

for whites, although such rules have caused disruptive local shortages of skilled labor. Last year, Pretoria initiated technical training programs that could eventually upgrade thousands of black workers. Vorster, however, has not yet publicly recognized the eventual necessity of drastically revising the job-reservation laws.

The Bantustan Program

The Prime Minister's commitment to a program that will transform at least some of the tribal homelands into independent Bantustans within the present decade is an election issue. Plans for partial consolidation of the eight homelands that now have some degree of self-government have been pushed through parliament despite bitter opposition from white farmers who face resettlement. Implementing the plans, however, will be a very slow, costly process, and the final result will not leave any of the Bantustans with adequate resources to support the tribal populations that are supposed to return to their homelands.

Last November, leaders of six Bantustans met at Umtata, capital of Transkei, South Africa's oldest Bantustan, and asserted their determination to win a more adequate basis for independence. The "Umtata manifesto" called for early restoration of extensive tribal lands that are not included in the government's consolidation schemes. Meanwhile, the Bantustan leaders demanded full control over their administrative structures and freedom to negotiate directly with foreign governments for economic aid. The manifesto also called for an eventual federation of all the Bantustans.

The manifesto was doubly embarrassing for Vorster. The show of solidarity heightened fears of ultraconservatives that the Bantustan program is not producing its intended cast of docile vassals. On the other hand, the substance of the manifesto was ammunition for white liberals who maintain that the government should either provide the Bantustans with adequate resources or abandon its apartheid policy.

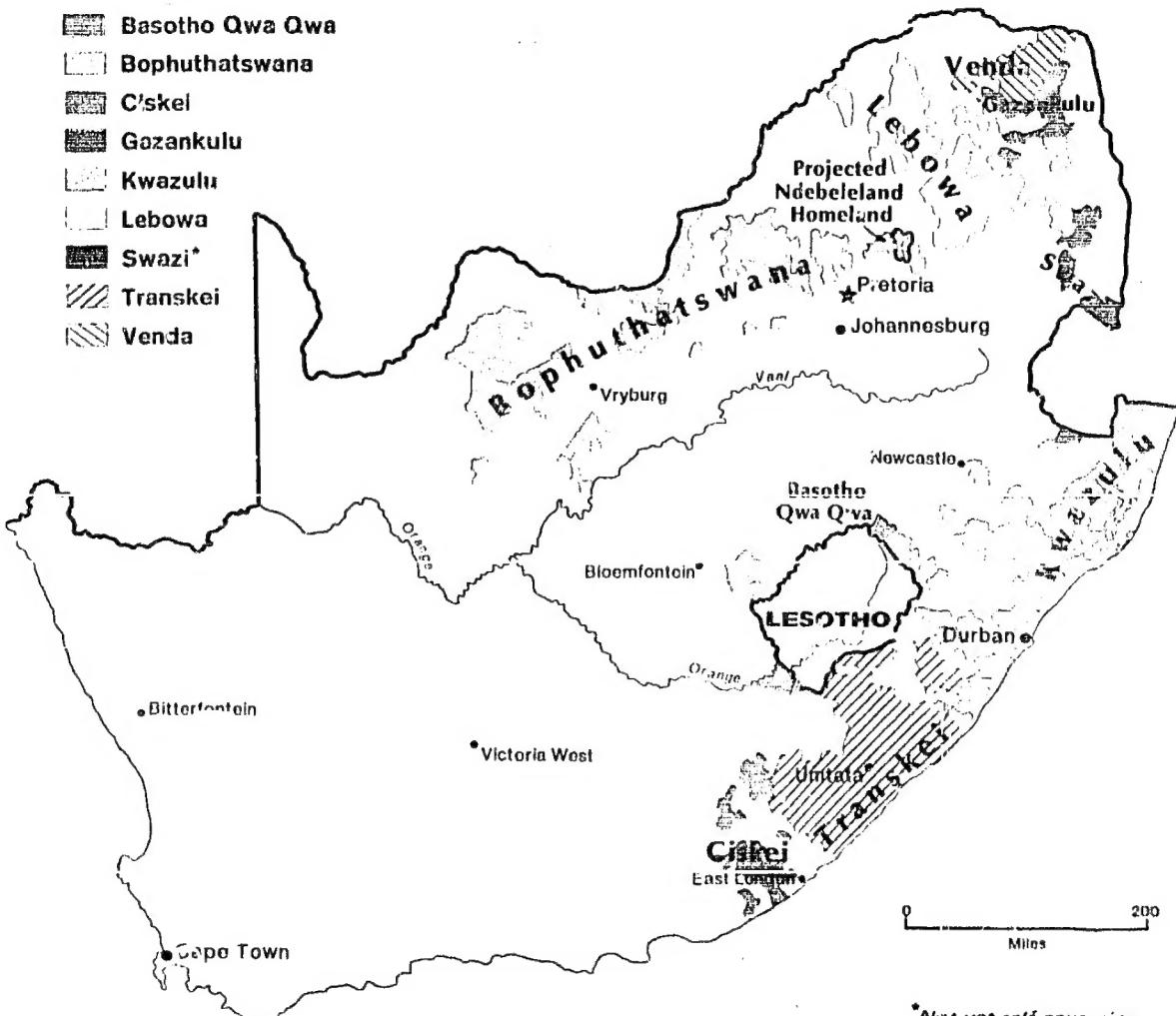


Chief Minister Matanzima



Chief Councillor Betelezi

South Africa: Bantustans



*Not yet self-governing

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Vorster has at least temporarily disarmed his critics on both sides by holding an informal discussion session with the leaders of all eight Bantustans early last month. He bluntly told the tribal leaders that he would not repeal the Native Trust Act of 1936, which sets a final limit for all tribal lands of only 13.7 percent of South Africa's total territory. Nevertheless, a joint statement issued at the session suggested that further meetings could mollify the Bantustan leaders with only minimal concessions from the government.

A week after this meeting, Transkei's leading political party held its annual congress and resolved to request full independence within five years. Although Transkei has had an autonomous administration since 1963, its chief minister, Kaiser Matanzima, had maintained that he would not accept independence until Pretoria ceded extensive territories that originally belonged to the Transkei's Xhosa tribe. After his party approved the independence resolution, however, Matanzima stated that an acceptable independence settlement might include no more than a small Indian Ocean seaport and other land parcels that have been tentatively promised by Vorster.

Prime Minister Vorster apparently has encouraged Matanzima's bid for independence in order to show South African whites, before they go to the polls, that the Bantustan program is working out to their advantage. It is doubtful, however, that the remaining tribal homelands could be brought to accept independence without concessions by Pretoria that would provoke serious white opposition. Transkei is the only Bantustan that has a consolidated territorial base, and leaders of other homelands have a greater need than Matanzima to insist on major land transfers before independence.

The land problem is the critical issue between Vorster and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwazulu, who is known internationally as the most outspoken of the Bantustan leaders. The Kwazulu homeland is fragmented into 188 pieces, and Buthelezi has rejected a blueprint for consolidation that would merely combine these bits of land into ten segments.

Vorster has strong incentives for reaching an accommodation with Buthelezi. The Zulus comprise the largest of all South Africa's tribal groupings and provide much of the industrial labor in the Durban area. Buthelezi or other members of the Kwazulu autonomous administration have played moderating roles in some of the recent strikes by Zulu industrial workers. Furthermore, Buthelezi has told overseas audiences that foreign companies should not be forced by their governments to withdraw from South Africa, provided they upgrade their black employees.

Black Urban Dwellers

The Bantustan program is supposed eventually to return all South African blacks except migrant workers to their tribal homelands, where they are expected to become farmers or to work in new factories that are to be situated in adjacent white areas. At present, however, roughly two thirds of all blacks live outside the homelands, and the black urban population is steadily increasing. White industrialists recognize that urban blacks must remain, because the homelands lack the resources to support them and because a settled black labor force is essential for industrial growth. Prime Minister Vorster is clearly seeking to make long-term provisions for black urban dwellers, but he must work within the confines of his party's apartheid doctrine.

The Bantustan leaders' Umlintla manifesto calls for a repeal of the pass laws that severely restrict residence and other activities of blacks outside the tribal homelands. Existing regulations not only compel a large portion of black urban workers to commute long distances to segregated residential areas, but also restrict the access of blacks to any facilities that might encourage them to linger outside the black areas. Any black who is apprehended in an area reserved for whites without a pass showing that he is legally employed there can be removed to his "homeland," even though he never actually lived in a tribal reserve.

When Vorster met with the Bantustan leaders last month, he agreed they could participate in a special commission that is to consider

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how the pass laws might be eased. Vorster has in fact been hinting since early 1973 that some accommodations for urban blacks were under consideration. Last January, for example, it was announced that restaurants for blacks would be permitted in urban white areas where blacks are regularly employed. Conceivably, the Prime Minister might negotiate a plan with the Bantustan leaders to extend the range of facilities for urban blacks, as well as some softening of the more irksome influx controls. Vorster may, in fact, welcome petitions for such measures from Bantustan leaders in order to convince the more conservative Afrikaners that economically essential accommodations for urban blacks are merely fulfilling the basic policy of separate development.

Crackdown on Dissenters

In sharp contrast with Vorster's pragmatic approach to social problems is his increasing use of harsh measures to silence anyone who openly opposes the government's policies for preserving white supremacy. The motivation of Vorster's recent moves is not clear. There has been no apparent revival of the communist-oriented revolutionary organizations that were thoroughly rooted out by the highly effective security services during the early 1960s. Vorster's present targets are mostly individuals of all races who advocate orderly economic or social progress for blacks, Asians, or coloreds.

The primary device for restraining individual dissenters is the "banning order"; the *Suppression of Communism Act* of 1962 empowers the minister of justice to ban any person he deems to be promoting "any objective of communism." Vorster has stretched the legal definition to include anyone who opposes any aspect of apartheid. The usual banning order severely restricts the individual's activities for a period of five years; the more stringent orders have the effect of house arrest.

At least 68 persons were banned during 1973, compared with only 14 in 1972. The recently banned individuals are mostly young blacks who were active in student or urban community organizations that advocate black soli-

darity in pursuit of material interests, instead of frontal attacks on apartheid institutions. The government's primary targets have been the South African Students' Organization, the Black People's Convention, and the Black Community Program. The bannings have included moderate as well as militant leaders, although the organizations as such have not been outlawed. Vorster apparently intends to silence any effective black leader who emerges outside the Bantustan structure.

Last February, before adjourning for the elections, the National Assembly approved two government bills that supplement the already extensive legal restraints against possibly subversive activities or organizations. The "Rotolo Assemblies Amendment Act" empowers a magistrate to prohibit or break up any meeting of two or more persons, even on private property, if he believes the meeting to be conducive to disorder or racial friction. The "Affected Organizations Act" is applicable to any South African organization that receives foreign support and "engages in politics." It is a criminal offense for such an organization—identifiable by three magistrates—to receive foreign funds, or to expend any funds on hand for any purpose except a recognized charity.

The second act appears to be aimed especially at the National Union of South African Students, the South African Institute of Race Relations, and the Christian Institute. These organizations are strongholds of English-speaking white liberals who advocate an orderly dismantling of some of the bulwarks of white supremacy. Since early 1972 all three organizations have been under investigation by a parliamentary commission on internal security; its final report is to be published soon after the elections. The timing of the "Affected Organizations Act" suggests that Vorster intended to focus public attention on the generally known foreign funding of these organizations because evidence is lacking that they have engaged in actual subversion.

Conceivably, Vorster's crackdown on the more articulate opponents of apartheid is intended to mollify ultraconservatives who distrust his pragmatic approach. It is also possible

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that he feels compelled to silence dissidents who are incapable of serious subversion in order to make sure that his cautious adjustments to changing conditions will not encourage radical elements to step up their activities. By suppressing such a broad spectrum of opinion, however, the government appears to be alienating the moderate leaders, both black and white, who are needed for constructive action.

International Pressures

In the current election campaign, the opposition has blamed the Nationalist government for South Africa's dangerous international isolation. Since last November the Arab oil embargo of South Africa, Portugal, and Rhodesia at the behest of the OAU has shown the futility of Prime Minister Vorster's persistent efforts to open a "dialogue" with leaders of the black African states. Malawi is the sole OAU member to maintain diplomatic ties with Pretoria; even Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland—all economically dependent on South Africa—have refused to exchange ambassadors unless Pretoria modifies its internal racial policies.

South African whites, however, usually applaud Vorster's assertions that his government will never abandon apartheid in order to curry international approval. Vorster also appears to be drawing political advantage from the white voters' anxiety concerning the insurgencies in neighboring white-ruled countries. The infrequent guerrilla incursions into South-West Africa, which Pretoria acquired as a League of Nations mandate in 1919, are a minor problem compared with the continual guerrilla warfare in Angola, Mozambique, and Rhodesia.

As early as 1967 several hundred South African police were stationed along the Rhodesia-Zambia border in order to prevent communist-trained South African saboteurs from returning home through Rhodesia. Since black Rhodesian insurgents began active terrorism in late 1972, South Africa has reinforced its police units in Rhodesia, and it has become apparent that these police are supporting the white Rhodesians' counterinsurgency operations. The South African

public responded fatalistically to the killing of four South African police by Rhodesian insurgents last month. Vorster commented that the incident showed the need for constant vigilance, and no opposition politician asked why South Africans had to serve in Rhodesia.

Instead, such incidents provoke outcries for reprisals against Zambia, where most southern African liberation movements have bases. Vorster, however, appears determined to avoid the sort of open strikes against any black state that would heighten international pressures on South Africa's major trading partners to go along with OAU demands for economic sanctions. Although government spokesmen in Pretoria met the Arab oil embargo with warnings that South Africa's black neighbors would be hardest hit, in practice the diminished supply of petroleum products has been shared equitably with Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland.

Recent developments in South-West Africa suggest that Vorster would forfeit South Africa's membership in the United Nations rather than substantially modify the Bantustan program, or any other policy that he considers essential for perpetuating white supremacy. In December 1972 the UN Security Council renewed Secretary General Waldheim's mandate to negotiate with Pretoria concerning a program that would prepare the territory for independence as a unified state. Although Vorster would not explicitly renounce the Bantustan program in South-West Africa, he did promise that Pretoria would promote self-determination, starting with repeal of restrictions on personal movement, association, and expression.

In mid-1973, however, Pretoria set up an autonomous administration for the Ovambos, who comprise almost half of the territory's population. The new Bantustan was in effect handed over to the traditional tribal chiefs, who prohibited their opponents from competing in the initial legislative election. Ovambos belonging to the South-West Africa People's Organization, which demands a modern government for the whole country, organized a near-total boycott of the Ovamboland election. Subsequently, South

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African police have systematically suppressed the organization and its youth league, arrested hundreds of its members, and condemned several leaders to long prison terms.

Outlook

The general election has stirred little interest among the all-white electorate inasmuch as the National Party is expected to renew its large majority. Nevertheless, the results could significantly affect the quality of the parliamentary opposition and its capabilities for promoting needed reforms.

If the United Party loses more than a few parliamentary seats, as appears possible, the demoralizing impact could push its present factions into a final break. Sir de Villiers Graaff might give up his loose party leadership, leaving Harry Schwarz, brash leader of the liberal faction in Transvaal Province, to force a showdown with the conservatives who control the party caucus in parliament. Should Schwarz gain control of the party caucus, some conservatives may go over to the National Party. If Schwarz is scuttled, he may leave the party and take with him many of the reform-minded industrialists.

It appears that the Progressive Party, which now has only one parliamentary seat, could win a few more from the United Party. In that event, the Progressive Party could become the rallying point for liberals who desert the larger parties. Although the Progressives have been mostly English-speaking, one of the party's candidates is a prominent Afrikaner journalist.

Even though such a grouping in parliament would be small, it could, if it is cohesive, advocate distinct alternatives to apartheid more effectively than the United Party has done. The United Party usually has sought to blur critical issues in order to hold together the remnants of its once-winning coalition of ideologically diverse elements. Cohesiveness, however, has seldom been shown by the South African whites who are seeking to

abolish or moderate apartheid. A more likely election aftermath is such disarray among Vorster's opponents that he will have a freer hand than ever before.

Some well-informed local politicians expect that Vorster will seize the opportunity of an overwhelming election victory to take long strides toward meeting the economic and social needs of South African blacks. If Vorster does go ahead with significant reforms, these probably will be based on some of the proposals that are being seriously discussed among Afrikaner intellectuals who hold to the basic tenets of separate development.

The possible scope of post-election reforms is suggested by a recent editorial in *Die Transvaler*, a leading Nationalist newspaper. The writer argued that sweeping modifications in the application of the government's apartheid policy must be put in motion within the next five years, maintaining that the bulk of the party's membership can be persuaded to accept such changes. The editorial proposed concrete objectives including accelerated land consolidation for the tribal homelands, adequate facilities for black urban dwellers, increased bargaining power for black industrial workers, and upgrading of many blacks to skilled jobs.

As Vorster has already taken some cautious steps toward all these objectives, the basic question is whether his rate of change will match the mounting pressures, especially among black industrial workers. Even if Vorster squarely shoulders the thankless task of persuading Afrikaner farmers and industrial workers to accept hitherto intolerable erosions of their manifold advantages, it does not appear likely that the black masses will wait indefinitely for gradualist programs to unfold. Vorster's tightening of the restraints on dissent, moreover, is reducing the possibilities for open consideration of alternatives that could reduce potentially explosive tensions.

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